
Improving the Management of Reserve Forces

By JOHN C.F. TILLSON

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Debate over the role, composition, and employment of the active and Reserve components has gone on since the Revolution. Modern efforts to resolve it began with the total force policy in 1970. In his FY71 annual report on Reserve forces, Secretary of Defense Melvin Laird directed that the Reserve components be considered part of the total force available to achieve U.S. security interests. Through the 1970s they assumed a greater role in national strategy and by the end of the decade were getting the equipment and resources needed to maintain manning levels.

In the 1980s and 1990s the Reserve components improved their capabilities and increased their support to active forces. Both equipment and training in Army Reserve combat and support forces have been upgraded. Naval Reserve ships and aircraft squadrons have received modern systems and training. Air Force Reserve fighter, tanker, and airlift squadrons have been equipped with modern aircraft and funds to sustain near-active capability. The Marine Corps Reserve has been organized, equipped, and trained to reinforce and augment the active component and is increasingly integrated with active forces.

Active and Reserve component Air Force flying units train to the same standards, although active units train for more tasks. Reserve combat

units periodically execute the same operational missions as their active counterparts (for example, Reserve combat and support units are operating in and over Bosnia). Also, they perform to the same standards in operational readiness inspections and win many total force flying competitions. Many Reservists serve more than 100 days of active duty per year, generally in two to three week increments.

Army Reserve artillery and Special Forces units routinely perform to standard—although in fewer tasks than active units. Naval Reserve squadrons and ships train to the same standards as the active Navy. Airlift and combat search and rescue represent 100 percent of the available assets and have become the training standard. Marine Corps Reserve combat battalions were successful in the Gulf War. Each service employed both Reserve units and individual Reservists effectively in that conflict to provide increased levels of support in a range of missions.

Questions regarding the accessibility of Reserve forces and their willingness to serve have largely been resolved. They were deployed successfully not just in the Gulf but in Panama, Somalia, Haiti, Kuwait, the Sinai, and Bosnia. The President's willingness to mobilize Reservists and their enthusiastic response has quieted most skeptics. Congress resolved other mobilization issues by extending the length of time that Reserve forces can be called to active duty under a Presidential Selected Reserve Callup (PSRC) to 270 days.

Despite success, problems remain. Relations between the active and Reserve components are

John C.F. Tillson is a member of the Strategy, Forces, and Resources Division at the Institute for Defense Analyses and formerly served in the Office of the Secretary of Defense.

at times dysfunctional, largely because of different cultures. There is uncertainty about the forces needed to meet the demands of national military strategy. The Army might have an excess of combat units but lack support personnel. There might be Reserve forces either that are not needed or that are needed in the active component for crisis response or forward deployment. There might be Reserve forces that should be reshaped or abolished. Some active forces could be eliminated or transferred to the Reserve components at substantial savings. The process for mobilizing and employing Reserve forces needs to be improved.

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[EDITOR'S NOTE: *There are five active and seven Reserve components. Each military service—the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard—has an active component. The Reserve components include the Army Reserve and Army National Guard, Naval Reserve, Marine Corps Reserve, Air Force Reserve and Air National Guard, and Coast Guard Reserve. Consequently, terms such as Reserves and Reserve forces refer generically to the Army, Naval, Marine Corps, Air Force, and Coast Guard Reserve as well as the Army and Air National Guard.*]

Changing Culture

The first step is to change the culture of the active and Reserve components to enhance the effectiveness of the total force concept. This means influencing the beliefs, values, and wishes of each component with respect to the organization, capabilities, and expertise of the other.

Cooperation and trust are central to the total force. But lack of trust between the active and Reserve components is an impediment. The resulting competition is dysfunctional. We can no longer afford to maintain ineffective or overlapping capabilities because of poor cooperation or distrust among services or between components.

Each service has improved. The Air Force trains and evaluates its active and Reserve units at the same facilities (such as Red Flag) and to the same standard so that both components are confident in one another. The Air Force shows confidence in the Reserves by assigning them missions such as independent operations over Bosnia and allowing them to compete for new missions and functions. Active and Reserve members of the Air Force are enthusiastic about management practices that allow Reservists to take over specific functions or missions. In the Marine Corps, active duty officers command Reserve regiments

and air groups, and active Marine Corps officers and enlisted members, functioning as instructors and inspectors, are responsible for the readiness of Reserve units. Some Naval Reserve ships are commanded by active officers.

Associate relationships between the active and Reserve components have proven successful in changing culture at unit level. Members of Army roundout brigades that worked closely with active parent units report great satisfaction in learning from their active counterparts while preparing to go to war together. These and other steps could be incorporated in individual service practices to raise levels of cooperation and mutual trust among members of both components. They could increase Reserve readiness and, by involving people with new ideas from the civil sector, enhance the level of innovation in the individual services.

Many of the initiatives below could improve cooperation and trust between the components and already are practiced in some services. The Army is implementing some of them in National Guard enhanced brigades. Most would also enhance Reserve readiness and total force efficiency.

- Train active and Reserve forces to the same standard and require both to demonstrate performance to standard. Make active commanders accountable for Reserve component readiness. Train Reserve units in fewer tasks to recognize their limited time for training. Link units and tasks to specific contingency plans.

- Expand opportunities for members of one component to serve in the other to enhance Reserve readiness and mutual understanding.

- Make active component duty with Reserve units career-enhancing by making it equivalent to command time (for example, active Marine instructors and inspectors assigned to Reserve units are selected by central command selection boards and receive command credit).

- Ensure that management information systems (in areas such as personnel and finance) operate seamlessly or handle members of both components under a single system.

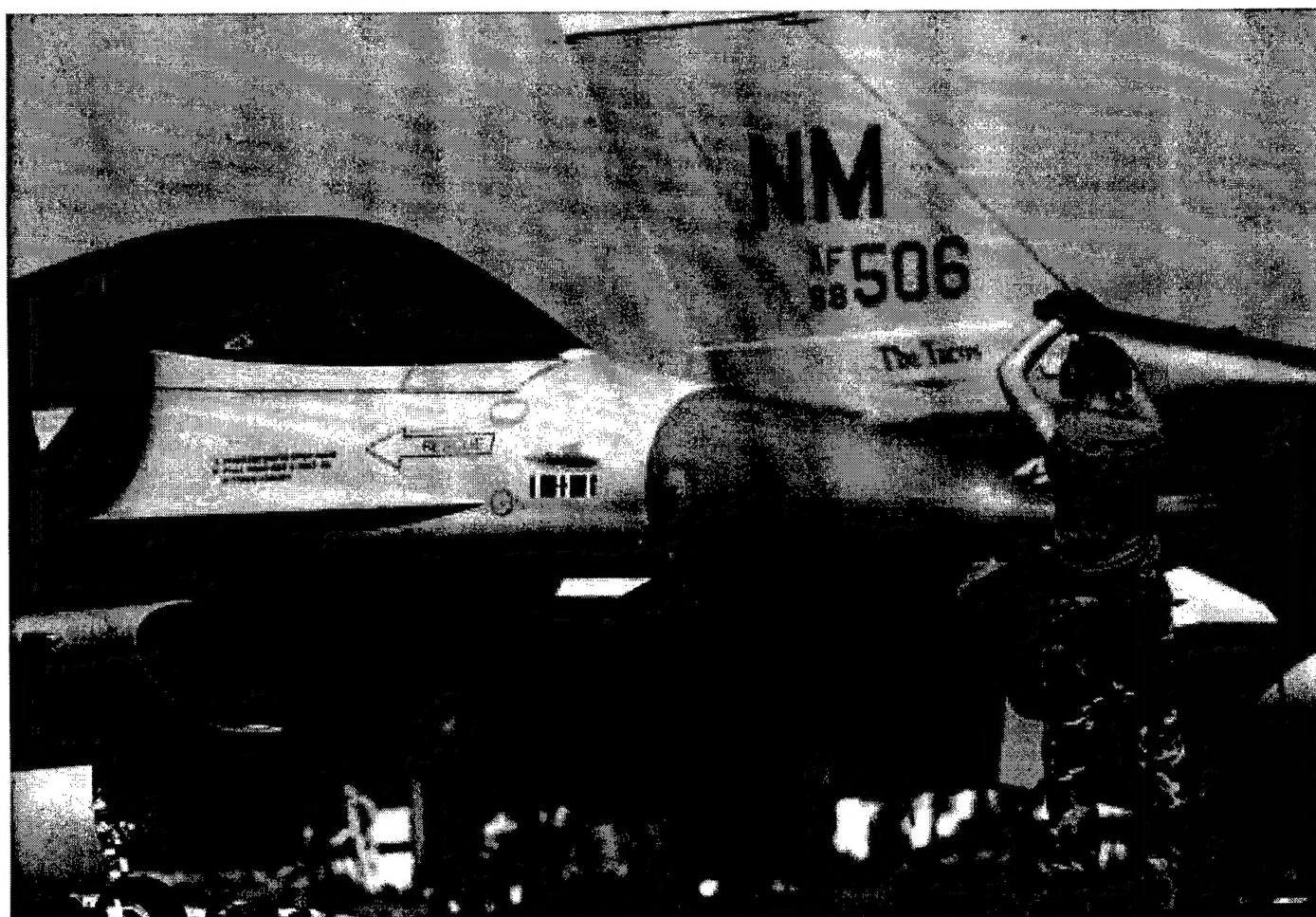
- Develop educational programs that promote integration and mutual understanding of the history and background of each component.

- Simplify the transition for individuals and units between components.

- Conduct more integrated active and Reserve component training such as that performed at Army combat training centers and in the Air Force through air-to-air and bombing competitions.

- Increase the number of full-time (either active or Reserve) commanders and staff officers in Reserve units, especially in early deploying units.

- Adopt the Air Force notion of resourcing and assigning missions to the Reserve whereby the components work together to identify the resources needed to perform Reserve missions to standard and also the additional resources to tackle more demanding missions.



Air National Guard
F-16 in northern
Australia.

Expanding Total Force Policy

The next step is to expand total force policy by greater use of Reserve forces. Employment of them in recent years has been influenced by our experience during the Cold War and in Vietnam. The Cold War threatened national existence and required a large ready force. High readiness led not only to a bias in favor of active forces but also to providing the Reserve components with the resources to maintain unprecedented readiness. The decision not to call up the Reserves during Vietnam created an impression that they would only be used in a conflict against the Warsaw Pact. The end of the Cold War lifted the threat to national existence, yet the demands on our forces have steadily increased. This change in threat allows a less stringent calculation of risk, demands to cut defense spending, and increased potential for "less ready" forces. Three complementary options arise for the Reserve components in this environment: using some Reserve forces in lieu of active forces to meet new security needs, preserving other Reserve forces at low readiness for a major

national emergency that arises with long warning, and eliminating or reshaping any Reserve forces unable to meet these new demands.

History demonstrates that the Reserve components can perform critical jobs and are rapidly available on a voluntary or involuntary basis. This suggests they can often be used in lieu of active forces. Reserve component forces were used five times in recent years for major military operations and were included in planning for the reinforcement of Kuwait in 1994. They supported ground and air operations in Bosnia and Army multinational force and observer missions in the Sinai. Despite procedural and execution problems in joint and service management structures, the Reserve units themselves performed successfully in all cases.

In the Gulf War many Reserve combat and combat support units demonstrated an ability to perform to standard with little post-mobilization training. Two Army artillery brigades displayed

U.S. Air Force (Val Gampel)

Special Forces
and Navy Seabee
Reservists, Mountain
Bee '97.



U.S. Navy (Jeffrey S. Viano)

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their performance in combat. Other units such as an Apache battalion, a Special Forces group, and a Reserve mechanized brigade were mobilized and performed to standard in tests and exercises. Marine and Air Force combat units likewise performed to standard in the Gulf. No Navy combat units were used in the war. In each service there was strong opposition in the active component to calling up Reserve combat units. Nevertheless, as General Colin Powell told Congress, "The success of the Guard and Reserve participation in Desert Shield cannot be overemphasized."

The successful voluntary and involuntary use of the Reserve components has demonstrated their capabilities in a variety of contingencies. Given pressure to cut spending, new threats, and the ability of Reserves to perform to the same standard as active forces, it is appropriate to consider changing force planning and programming guidance to give priority to Reserve over active forces. This assumes that Reserve forces display their ability to do the job. Those that do not can be put in a low readiness status or eliminated. Such change would also be consistent with our

basic national values and militia tradition. Moreover, just as the decision to mobilize Reserves for the Gulf War helped commit the public to the Nation's objectives, their more frequent use also can enhance links between the Armed Forces and the American people.

Expanding total force policy requires changes in planning and programming guidance for active and Reserve forces, in plans for using Reserves, and in the ways such forces are managed, trained, and resourced. The expansion of the total force policy thus calls for a number of changes to be made. First, convert force planning and programming guidance to provide preference for placing forces in the Reserve. For example, put combat and support forces in the Reserve if they exhibit the ability to meet performance standards and deployment schedules suitable for assigned missions and if they are not required for forward presence or deployment.

Second, explicitly plan to call up combat and support forces for every contingency—from peace operations to a major regional conflict (MRC). Plan a balanced active and Reserve combat and

support force for the first MRC to assure the availability of a similar force for the second. Plan for mainly active combat forces in the first MRC and mainly Reserve combat forces for the second. Establish a policy calling for routine PSRC use. Develop simplified PSRC planning and execution procedures that, for example, require Reserve units identified for early deployment to demonstrate pre-mobilization performance to the same standards as active units. Reserves scheduled for later deployment must meet these standards after a designated period of post-mobilization training. Call up Reserve forces as part of the initial force or a rotation base (for example, deploy Air Force Reserve fighter squadrons in parallel with active units in a contingency; call up Reserve units, from civil affairs to infantry battalions, on a rotation basis for peace operations). Assure the readiness of Reserves for these missions by identifying units in advance. Plan for the use of volunteers—units and individuals, Reservists and retirees—in those operations including those for which PSRCs can be employed. For example, the Air Force might accept volunteers for individual flying missions while other services might call up entire units. Improve planning and execution procedures so that PSRC authority can be obtained rapidly and applied efficiently.

Third, improve Reserve management and training and provide added resources to enhance Reserve readiness and capabilities. Increase personnel and unit stability by enlarging the number of prior service personnel in Reserve units. Consider offering benefits such as affiliation bonuses, educational incentives, and enlistment contracts that cover both active and Reserve service. Modify Reserve compensation policy to take account of variations in the economy and to reduce turbulence through job tenure. Change the promotion system to avoid penalizing Reservists for staying in one assignment for an extended period. Provide income insurance to address disparities in civilian and military pay in order to improve retention and willingness to perform frequent tours of involuntary duty.

Give priority to early deploying units in allocating deployable full-time support personnel. Limit the frequency of unit reorganization since commanders report that it destroys readiness and morale in Reserve units. Improve pre-mobilization training with the use of simulators, multi-year scheduling, and close association with active units. Train specific Reserve units for peace and humanitarian relief operations so the Reserves can be used early. Improve plans and facilities for post-mobilization training. Ensure the availability of active and Reserve trainers. Organize training facilities for both components to ensure efficient post-mobilization training.

Realizing Potential

The last step is to examine new possibilities and validate Reserve capabilities. There will be opposition to some of the above proposals. However, while none of the changes have to be made overnight, virtually all can be preceded by experiments and pilot projects that investigate their potential. Proceeding in a reasoned, deliberate manner will generate support for change in both the active and Reserve components. Assigning an outsider to play a major role in the design, conduct, and evaluation of these changes will lend credibility to the results.

Decisions on the mix of active and Reserve forces and on new roles and functions for the Reserves are difficult to make absent good data. Tests can be conducted to assess the ability of both components to perform to standard (such as readiness for the range of military operations), devise ways to achieve Reserve readiness levels more quickly, experiment with organizational and training concepts and with increased levels of resources, experiment initially with Army combat maneuver brigades and Navy surface ships and carrier aviation, and establish pilot programs to test new concepts (such as a multi-year plan for a Reserve division to bring one maneuver brigade per year to a high level of readiness and to keep it there for a year).

The United States is gradually adjusting to the challenges of the new strategic environment. The most difficult changes may be taking place in the minds of the people, military and civilian, who must determine the direction the Armed Forces must take. Having won the Cold War, we do not have the shock of defeat to motivate change quickly. Nor is it necessary. Precipitate actions to reduce our forces or make other dramatic changes could lead to serious problems.

Nevertheless, if there is no major threat to our national security we can anticipate a steady reduction in defense spending that will compel us to make substantial changes in the size of our forces. Improving the management of Reserve forces will increase their readiness and ability to perform to standard. As their capabilities grow, we can rely more on the Reserves at the expense of the active component which will allow us to maintain force structure at least cost. Moreover, greater reliance on militia forces in lieu of a large standing military is consistent with the history and traditions of the Nation.

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